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CAN EDUCATION PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT?

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## Can Education Promote Development?

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If development is defined as mainly improving the standard of living of the poorest 40 per cent of the people in the developing world, then experience shows that present education strategies have failed. This article examines why this has happened and, taking Pakistan as a prime example, looks at ways in which new approaches to the problem could improve the situation.

Education can promote development, but it depends on how development is defined. If it is seen as mainly economic growth, which tends to benefit upper-income groups, then schooling has contributed to it by widening the skills and raising the productivity of future workers. If development is defined as mainly improving the standard of living of the poorest 40 per cent of the population, most of whom are either illiterates or primary school dropouts, then presumably formal schooling has not done much for them. In fact, the data show that investment in education widens the gap between rich and poor in most countries. This results from mechanisms like regressive tax systems, expensive secondary schooling, and free higher education all of which mainly benefit upper-income families. For this article I will define development as movement toward a more humane society than now exists in both developing and developed nations. This requires political systems more responsive to the interests of the poor. It also requires rising real income as well as a more equal distribution and management of wealth.

## Types of Education

Before looking at some of the issues, a description of the terms might be useful. Formal education or schooling describes the learning that takes place in schools, and trains students mainly for urban, modern-sector jobs. Learning, however, also takes place outside school, at home, on the street, and on the job. This is learning by living or learning by doing, and can be called informal education. One of the few countries which recognize the importance of informal education during the first ten years of school is China; it has captured some of its benefits by getting the students into informal learning situations on the farms and in the factories. All over the world professional training in some disciplines like medicine has long recognized the importance of informal on-the-job learning.

Nonformal education is organized learning outside the normal school university curriculum - examples include the training of agricultural extension agents in short courses and teaching adults literacy in the evening. Thus nonformal education coexists with formal education, but it receives little funding and less prestige than formal education. Upsetting the existing balance between the two it is a major source of conflict among educational interest groups.

Finally, there is adult education for self-reliance and participation, which has its roots both in community development and worker participation in management. Although Paulo Freire, Julius Nyerere, Saul Alinsky, and Adam Curle have developed the concept recently, Mahatma Gandhi and others preceded them. Mao Tse-tung, however, gave the approach its most comprehensive elaboration and application. It helps groups of people learn how to study together and become aware of the political and economic determinants

of their poverty. They then learn to organize and mobilize to improve their circumstances. This differs from the often paternalistic community development approach of the past which relied on outside experts. These adult groups learn that with cooperation and organization they can build roads, manage water distribution, reduce neighborhood crime, and grow more food. They learn that they can select their own people to be sent for training as paramedics and teachers. Through co-operative saving they reduce their dependence on money lenders. And when these things happen to them, they develop a self-confidence which in turn generates further initiatives.

Julius Nyerere has emphasized that "People can only develop themselves; they cannot be developed. Adult education is the key because it will help men and women to think for themselves, make their own decisions, and execute those decisions for themselves." The rural poor have to transform themselves from being acted upon to being actors.

#### Failure of Present System

During the last ten years many observers saw that formal education in developing countries was not meeting most of the poor's needs. Formal education provided training for urban, white-collar jobs while most jobs, and the major development problems, tended to be manual and in rural areas. The students from most poor families, moreover, were generally unable to continue formal education to the university level. In fact, what the poor do learn from formal education is that they are failures. They fail to be promoted from one grade to the next in primary school, or they fail the entrance exam to secondary school.

Educators, the gatekeepers to job security and high incomes, reject them as unfit. In most countries, the poor are resigned to letting the educational establishment decide their fate and legitimize their poverty. Gunnar Myrdal, the Nobel Laureate in economics, has explained that "The poor are not educated to see their interests and they are not organized to fight for their interests." They lack education for critical awareness and organization.

We can illustrate the nature of the problems with a few facts from Pakistan. Other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America share many of Pakistan's problems, or will soon encounter them.

- . About 6 per cent of the labor force is estimated to be unemployed and twice as many are seriously underemployed.

- . One third of those who are unemployed, about one million adults, have completed primary education or more.

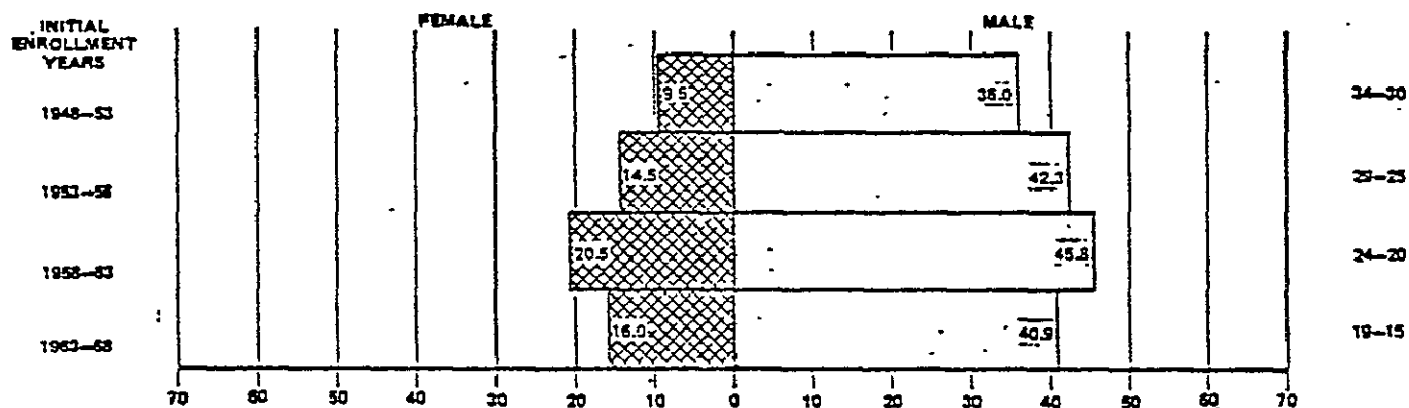
- . Illiterate workers find jobs more quickly than the unemployed with education, even though there are three times as many illiterates who are unemployed.

- . 40 per cent of the vocational school graduates have been unemployed for two to four years after graduation.

- . 27 per cent of the population tell the census-taker that they can read. However, when literacy is measured as the ability to read and understand a newspaper, only 14 per cent of the population is literate (19 per cent of males and 6 per cent of females).

- . Although universal primary education has been a government objective for almost 30 years and total enrollments have been steadily increasing, the number of children completing primary school is falling. Only 30 per cent of the present 15-19 age cohort have completed primary school, as opposed to 35 per cent of the 20-24 age cohort. *See Annex 1, below.*

**FIGURE 1**  
**SIMPLE LITERACY PYRAMIDS FOR PAKISTAN**  
**(PERCENT OF POPULATION WITH PRIMARY EDUCATION OR MORE)**



Source: 1973 MED Survey. Retention figures based on enrollment data supplied by the Planning Commission

. Because of dropouts and low reading achievement, we can say that less than 8 per cent of those who turn 12 years old each year can read and understand a newspaper.

Given these conditions, the 36 per cent of the nation's education budget allocated to primary education goes either to producing generally illiterate primary school leavers, or to financing a most expensive, and inefficient, means of selecting students for secondary education.

. At the nation's eight universities we find the classic diploma factories. In one hour teachers grade 30 exams, each covering two years of a student's work. While observers agree that student and teacher performance has fallen, the number graduating with highest honors has quadrupled. Four years ago only 10 per cent graduated with "first divisions," and now more than 40 per cent do. Some university libraries have added no books in the past several years. Instead funds have gone to more buildings:

. Nine out of ten graduates in the university courses in pharmacy have taken jobs abroad in the past few years. One reason is that there are not even posts for pharmacists in hospitals or clinics. Those who have gone abroad do not expect to return.

. There is only one doctor for 24,200 rural people, one of the lowest ratios in the world. The doctor-nurse ratio is about three doctors for one nurse instead of one to three, a more normal standard (even with these conditions, the government allows most new MDs to emigrate).

. Free education in Pakistan, in theory, gives equal opportunity to the poor to reach high-paying jobs. The data, however, show that children of upper-income families are overrepresented by 2,700 per cent at the university level in comparison to the percentage of upper-income families in the population. Not even Arthur Jensen, the geneticist, would argue that the rich are 2,700 per cent more able to benefit from a university education.

Is Pakistan the extreme sole example of these educational problems? Unfortunately not. Similar problems are visible in countries as economically and educationally different from Pakistan as Brazil, Tunisia, and Liberia.

These problems can be grouped into three categories:

- (1) inefficiencies within the schools and the education system which are measured by high dropout rates, illiterate graduates, and the lack of paper, pencils, textbooks, and even teachers in the classrooms;
- (2) mismatch between what the schools are producing and what employers, citizens, young people, and parents need - these problems are seen in educated unemployed, and parents and citizens from low-income groups who lack information about sanitation and child care; and
- (3) inequities in distributing both educational opportunities and educational results to the rural and urban poor.

These problems have been around for so long, and appear so intractable, that analysts have reluctantly reached four main conclusions.

First, neither the lack of knowledge nor the limitations of educational planning have been a major reason why education systems have been so slow to change. A recent international meeting of educational planners concluded that even when better information is available, it is not used; even carefully prepared plans are shelved or partially implemented.

Second, both formal and nonformal education are shaped by the political and economic institutions of a country. Reforming education, therefore, means that successful political and economic reform comes first. Even seemingly minor changes, like replacing the "irrelevant" academic curricula,

with vocational training, will be resisted by the present leadership since the academic curricula tends to reinforce the existing power structure. The authors of the Vth Plan in Pakistan argued that "the interest groups affected ... are likely to protest vigorously."

Third, as Torsten Husen, the Swedish educator and reformer, has acknowledged, within the past ten years around the world "the mood has swung from the almost euphoric conception of education as the Great Equalizer to that of education as the Great Sieve that sorts and certifies people for their (predetermined) slot in society."

Fourth, the evidence suggests that further investment in most aspects of the existing education systems of nonsocialist developing countries would work against the interests of the poor, not for them.

#### Solutions

What can a government such as Pakistan's do for the one million educated who are now unemployed, plus the next million who will soon suffer the same fate? If it reduced the number of new graduates from the high schools and universities, the middle and upper class, which put the government in power, would withdraw their support. These groups want more school places for their children, not less. If the government required employers to hire the one million educated unemployed, thus increasing by 5 per cent the number of their employees, the employers would complain of higher costs and lower profits. They could threaten to withdraw their political support. Finally, if the educated unemployed were hired, then the two million who are unemployed, but uneducated, might take to the streets to demand equal treatment with the educated.

Can the mismatch between the labor market and education be reduced in the future? There is some hope for the discussions of the reform of technical training. Training institutions in Brazil and Singapore are managed by employers, craftsmen, and educators. This cooperative management approach permits the close supervision of both quality and quantity. Pakistani officials are studying this approach.

Lack of funds and lack of local responsibility for primary schools and secondary schools are two major problems. Although successive governments have promised universal primary education, no one can predict when it will happen. While the solutions are at hand, they all upset the status quo.

For example, in Pakistan, 40 per cent of the educational capital budget at the Federal level goes for university training, but some of it contributes to the brain drain and to the numbers of educated unemployed. Because primary school costs per student are less than 1 per cent of the costs of a university student, the Pakistan Government could educate 100 students through primary school for each student not admitted to the university. As the authors of the Vth Plan argued, this would be politically unacceptable: children of upper-income parents would be denied university places.

Similarly, providing control over schools to neighborhoods and villages would upset the socio-political balance and the central administration in some of its power. Villagers with new confidence may then challenge the rural elite - the landlords.

What can the government do to eliminate a dual education system which trains some for mental labor, and others for manual labor? Quite simply, with a possible exception, they can do very little now. If my analysis is correct, and the government aim is to avoid widened confrontation, then the government first has to continue to decrease slowly the economic power of both the present landowning elite and the bureaucracy and continue to

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decentralize political power in order to reduce the support for a dual educational system. The exception is for the government to expand its support for the existing pilot projects in education for self-reliance and participation.

These examples reveal the interest groups of the society which prevent educational reforms from taking place. The landlords require a low-cost and docile labor force. Thus they neither want peasants to become independent nor unemployment to shrink. The educators do not want to lower "academic" standards by adopting more nonformal methods, nor to lose their jobs. Similarly the middle and upper-class parents fear that opening more primary schools for the rural poor may mean losing places for their children at secondary school and the university. Governments are inevitably sensitive to these conflicts and, at least in an ostensible period of transition to socialism, hesitate to alienate the support of any of these groups. The Pakistani government shares these problems.

#### "Expert" solutions

Many outside experts have recently reached agreement about the relevance of nonformal education for poor countries. They urge the expansion of nonformal education to reduce the mismatch between educational supply and employment demand. And most of them agree that the expansion of formal education at the secondary and higher levels should be stabilized at present rates of enrollment growth, or slowly reduced.

The greatest economic need, the experts perceive, is in training specialists in all aspects of rural development or self-employment. World Bank authors wrote in 1974 that formal "educational systems have been irrelevant to the needs of developing countries for the past two decades." The Bank then urged a program of nonformal and basic vocational education.

But other observers have not been so enthusiastic about replacing formal education with a substitute that has been little tried. Ministers of education have been noticeably cool to such suggestions.

Why? The short answer is that the expansion of nonformal education will cut into the funds allocated for formal education which is more prestigious and in greater demand. But there is another, equally serious problem. The expansion of technical and nonformal education will reinforce a dual system of education, with one side of the system training students for manual labor jobs, and the other for mental labor; one side for mainly rural employment, the other for urban. The dual system reinforces the social and political status quo; unchanged, it adversely affects the poor and their interests. Thus, unwittingly, the nonformal strategy works against the poor, except in countries like China and Cuba where the reduction of poverty is the highest priority of the leadership. In nonsocialist countries, it appears, nonformal education streams poorer children into manual jobs and reinforces the class structure.

The extent of the opposition among educators and middle-class parents to nonformal education is impressive. They feel that formal education is relevant to their needs. Lower-income parents would also object to a dual education system that would stream their children into manual jobs while still in primary school.

### Outlook

But there is still hope, and Pakistan has experiences with education for self-reliance and participation which might benefit other countries. The Government is putting more and more faith in the people in the villages and neighborhoods to study and solve their own problems. A project in one province has 80 villages selecting their own teachers, managing their school affairs, and maintaining the buildings. When faced with the lack of space, ~~several village school councils decided to use the mosque which was empty most~~

of the day. The council has employed students to clean the school and maintain the grounds. Teacher attendance has improved as villagers, not distant supervisors, are responsible for the selection of teachers and their attendance. The Bhutto government, which was in power when this article was written, also avoided conflict with possible opposition forces by keeping the project small and experimental. Significantly, it created a climate to encourage self-help efforts by stressing its motto, "Power to the people."

Another project for 400 villages across the country is encouraging village planning and management of community development efforts, including both health and education. Initiated with the Ministry of Education and the cooperation of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Government is supplying partial finance of the improvements.

It is too early to say whether these projects will succeed after the initial enthusiasm and government attention. However, the objective of the decentralization of education power is consistent with World Bank policy to increase the participation of target groups in planning and managing Bank projects.

Although the Chinese acknowledge problems with their education system, their programs in education, health, and rural development come closest to the World Bank's description of the ideal programs for a developing country. In education they have a curriculum relevant to the needs of the mass of the population, ten years of schooling almost universally available, and a university selection process that minimizes discrimination against the poor - all achieved at low cost within twenty years. Even countries with five times the per capita income of China's \$250, and the same objectives in their development plans, have not achieved these results.

In other countries, education programs are emerging that benefit the poor and some have Bank support. Tanzania has made remarkable progress but, as President Nyerere has recently emphasized, the implementation appears to have slowed down. Other countries like Angola, Botswana, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Somalia, Zambia, Guyana, Jamaica, and Sri Lanka are reshaping the old education system to the new development needs,

but have neither developed a comprehensive strategy nor sufficient implementation based on the participation of target groups. The failure of efforts in the 1960s to organize peasants to study and pursue their needs in northeast Brazil should remind us that the approach may not work in some countries. The desirable transformation of education cannot take place without the effort and struggle of the mass of the population and the support of the leadership.

In conclusion, it is easy for technicians to come up with what appear to be theoretically sound solutions like non-formal education that in practice may even work against the very groups like the poor the technicians are trying to help. Small, but important, steps like those taken by Pakistan to place more confidence in local decision-makers are significant. The analysis suggests that training components in health, small industry and rural development projects may be the most effective way to provide the basic skills and information needed by the poor. While new education programs will probably remain experimental until the political and economic power shifts to a more responsive and representative leadership, international agencies should support country efforts in education for self-reliance and participation.

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This article has been adapted from an address to the Fourth International Health Conference, Washington, D.C., March 29, 1977.

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